Author Name: Diptajyoti Haldar

Designation: Student

Institution: Jadavpur University

Contact Details:

Email: diptajyoti333@gmail.com

Theme: Corruption In Politics and Power

Title: Mapping Political Corruption in West Bengal: Thematic Analysis of a Decade, 2010-2020

For Citation (APA 7th) –

Haldar, D. (2026). Mapping political corruption in West Bengal: Thematic analysis of a decade, 2010–2020. In B. Ghosh, K. K. Sarkar, & B. Chakrabortty (Eds.), Corruption: Origin, development and consequences. Kunal Books. ISBN 978-93-6389-298-9

MAPPING POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN WEST BENGAL: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF A DECADE, 2010-2020

ABSTRACT:

This study points out a thematic analysis of political corruption in West Bengal from 2010 to 2020, a decade of scandals and scams from the 34-year Left Front (CPI-M) regime to the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) administration. This research maps the evolution of corruption from an institutionalised, party-centric model to a more personalised, transactional, and populist form. Based on a qualitative research method and through analysis of major scandals, including the Saradha and Rose Valley Ponzi schemes, the Narada sting operation, and systemic rackets in illegal coal mining and cattle smuggling. The main research question of this study is: During the big political shift in West Bengal from 2010 to 2020, what did corruption by politicians actually look like, what were the most common types of scams, and how exactly did they execute them? The main objectives of this study are 1) to systematically document and classify the major incidents of political corruption reported in West Bengal between 2010 and 2020. 2) To find out the various impacts of corruption on West Bengal's governance, economic development, public trust, and political landscape. The main findings of this study are: 1) the political economy of dejection, where socio-economic numbness created easy ground for fraudulent financial schemes that expanded on political guardianship. 2) The normalisation of corruption, where the TMC's populist welfarism created a public perception of bribery as a "necessary evil" for accessing state services, and a disconnect between corruption allegations and electoral outcomes. In conclusion, the corrupt system and untrustworthy political parties signify an undemocratic and petty way of politics in West Bengal.

KEYWORDS: West Bengal, Politics, Corruption, Power-Dynamics, Governance, Patronage Politics, Syndicate Raj.

A PROLOGUE:

Corruption is not only a social evil but also a moral evil and a systematic sin that can destroy generation after generation. West Bengal has seen many decades of corruption, particularly political corruption. Political corruption can be understood as the misuse of public office or authority for private or group enrichment. Political corruption represents a fundamental violation of public trust, where collective goods are converted into private payoffs through illegitimate means. This phenomenon is not simply a series of isolated, illegal acts but can also become a potential systemic problem that challenges the very essence of the political process.

A DECADE OF CORRUPTION IN WEST BENGAL –

To date, eight governments have ruled West Bengal, starting with Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and ending with Mamata Banerjee. The decade from 2010 to 2020 saw tremendous political corruption. In 2011, a historic election took place where the Trinamool Congress (TMC) defeated the Left Front government, which had been in power for an incredible 34 years. This was a dramatic shift in the state's leadership, although this regime change, in its initial time gave people hope of a new beginning, as portrayed by Mamata Banerjee, the leader of the new government, All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), but subsequent years have raised serious questions about the integrity of governance and the growing connection between corruption and political authority (Biswas, 2017). TMC, led by Mamata Banerjee, came up with a great yet clever slogan, “Poriborton”, which means change; also, her iconic dialogue “Ma, Mati, Manush” actually helped her to gain substantial public support. But are these slogans only for pre-election political manoeuvring, because what we actually see is that these slogans transform into the “Khela Hobe” slogan at the time of the election. My research asks a simple question: Did this new government clean up the system, or did corruption just find new ways to continue? The TMC government came into power mainly because of two incidents, the Nandigram Movement (2006-07) and the Singur Movement (2006-08). Both these movements were centrally associated with and opposed to the Left rule (Buddhadeb Bhattacharya's) vision of reviving West Bengal's economy through industrialisation. But due to political manipulation and extreme protest, the dream of building a ‘Special Economic Zone’ in Nandigram with Indonesian conglomerate Salim Group, for a 4,000-acre chemical hub, and in Singur, the Tata Nano project failed drastically (Kuniyl, 2024). Government data reveal that from 2011 to 2025, over 6600 companies, including 110 listed companies, shifted their base out of

West Bengal (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2025; Joshi, 2025). In several speeches, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has suggested various job ideas, such as 'Chop Shilpo' (fritter industry), and selling Tea, Jhalmuri, and Ghugni during Puja occasions, for the unemployed youth of Bengal.

But now the question is, why are we still unable to solve this political corruption? There are some persisting issues like ‘poverty’, lack of education particularly ‘political education’, and most importantly ‘normalisation of corruption’. We will discuss it later with real-world examples of how politicians or other individuals use these issues as a means of corruption.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF CORRUPTION (2010-2020):

The decade under TMC rule was defined by a series of grand corruption scandals that were distinct in their nature but interconnected with political patronage.

SARADHA CHIT FUND SCAM –

Saradha Group, founded by Sudipto Sen in the early 2000s, was marked as one of West Bengal’s biggest financial scandals. Saradha Group was operated as an umbrella organisation with 200 private participants. There were some reasons why this scam spread quickly- economic vulnerability among the common people of Bengal, political backup, celebrity recommendation, religious sentiment by using the name of ‘Ma Sarada Devi’, and Sudipto Sen’s masterstroke of using local agents as a reliable face. Although this scam was not actually a “Chit Fund scam”, but was a Ponzi Scheme or Collective Investment Scheme scam. But because of political support for this scheme, there were faces like ‘Satabdi Roy’, a famous actor and TMC leader, who served as Saradha's brand ambassador; TMC MP ‘Kunal Ghosh’, who was the CEO of the media firm; ‘Srinjoy Bose’; a very popular name ‘Madan Mitra’, who was the group's labour union leader and the West Bengal Transport Minister at the time; ‘Himanta Biswa Sarma’ the head of the Assam BJP at the time; Matang Sinh a Congressman at the time; and also popular figure like Mithoon Chakraborty (GN, 2022). Because of this much political and celebrity support, some greedy people and a huge portion of innocent people fell into their trap.

This scandal was systematic and sharp because Sudipto Sen not only had an alliance with politicians, but he also captured some of the powerful news media. Sudipto Sen bought ‘Channel

10’; he also wrote that he had to pay 60 lakhs per month to a leading Bengali newspaper named ‘Pratidin’, and apart from that, according to that agreement, Kunal Ghosh will also be appointed as the CEO of the channel at a salary of Rs 15 lakh per month (Sarkar, 2015). The Saradha group scandal managed to scam more than 4-6 billion USD from over 1.7 million depositors before its collapse in 2013 (Mathur & Dutt, 2024).

THE NARADA BRIBERY SCANDAL –

The Narada case is regarded as the second-largest scandal in West Bengal during the decade 2010-2020. This scandal came into public attention in 2016, although the whole mission started in 2014. If we compare between Saradha scam and the Narada bribery scam, we can see that the Narada bribery scam is more linked to the concept of political corruption, although there is no doubt that both these scandals are equally and highly corrosive for a society where politicians and bureaucrats are doing illegal activities for their personal interest.

From this case, we can have an idea of bribery as a ‘necessary evil’. Because in the Narada sting operation, Mathew Samuel, the founder of the 'Narada News', conducted a mission and uncovered that at least 12 TMC leaders, including state cabinet ministers, sitting MLAs, members of parliament (MPs) and an IPS officer were allegedly seen taking a bribe in exchange of giving business favour (Times of India, 2021). Some figures who got caught receiving money- ‘Firhad Hakim’ (Cabinet Minister); ‘Subrata Mukherjee’ (Cabinet Minister, now deceased); ‘Madan Mitra’ (Cabinet Minister, now MLA); ‘Suvendu Adhikari’ (TMC MP at the time, now Leader of Opposition with the BJP); ‘Mukul Roy’ (TMC MP at the time, later joined BJP); ‘Saugata Roy’ (TMC MP); ‘Kakon Ghosh Dastidar’ (TMC MP); ‘Prasun Banerjee’ (TMC MP); ‘Sovan Chatterjee’ (Mayor of Kolkata at the time); ‘SMH Mirza’ (A senior IPS officer, who was allegedly seen accepting cash on behalf of Mukul Roy). This incident raises a question about the government's credibility. The Narada scandal is not an ordinary case of corruption, but a serious concern, where corrupt politicians and bureaucrats are seen taking money by illegal means. As a citizen, as a youth or as an entrepreneur, how can we trust our government again? The Narada scandal reveals a dark side of our politics that you cannot succeed in life without giving or taking a bribe, and how nasty politics have become these days.

SSC RECRUITMENT SCAM –

The West Bengal School Service Commission (WBSSC) recruitment scam is a very tragic incident. The distribution and allocation of jobs by unfair means not only raises questions about the government's credibility but also corrupts the entire society. Because when you can get a job just by licking a politician's shoe or by bribing, why would a society or a youth improve themselves, and that means that government jobs are only meant for the upper-class individuals, who have economic and political privilege. When political corruption strikes its venom in education, it becomes more dangerous, because only education can destroy corruption. But when the education sector itself becomes corrupted, when unqualified or low-qualified corrupt individuals become teachers, they are not only holding a job, but they are the guardians of the future generation; they can build or destroy the future of a society, so corruption in education is highly harmful.

The SSC scam of West Bengal was revealed when the Calcutta High Court announced the verdict on all appointments by the SSC in the categories of teachers of classes 9, 10, 11 and 12 and group-C and D staffers through the State Level Selection Test (SLST) of 2016, where irregularities were found, declared null and void (DD News, 2024). It started in 2016 when the WBSSC held exams for around 24,640 school jobs. Many people, approximately 23 lakh aspirants, sat for those tests, wanting a secure future. But the final count of appointment letters issued was 25,753. This huge difference of over a thousand extra letters compared to the advertised jobs was a major issue of concern right from the start (The Economic Times, 2025). Investigations later revealed that a series of manipulations in the recruitment process, including tampered OMR sheets, fake merit lists, and appointments based on blank answer scripts. Many of those who got jobs allegedly paid bribes to secure their positions, bypassing merit entirely (The Economic Times, 2025). Because of these discrepancies and many allegations, A division bench of Justice Debangsu Basak and Shabbar Rashidi has passed an order, in which nearly 24,000 jobs were affected (Sengupta, 2024). WBSSC has acknowledged that 6,276 illegal appointments were made, but actually released 1,804 names (Chattopadhyay, 2025). This clearly portrays that because of some criminals and corrupt individuals, many qualified teachers lost their jobs, many aspirants gave up their goals, and many families were wrecked. Some prominent figures who are involved in this scandal are Partha Chatterjee, a former cabinet minister in TMC government who was also education minister of West Bengal at the time; former minister Paresh Chandra Adhikari; former state secondary education

board president Kalyanmoy Gangopadhyay; former SSC chairman Subires Bhattacharyya; former head of the SSC advisory committee Shanti Prasad Sinha; former SSC secretary Ashok Saha; and former SSC staff Samarjit Acharya and Parna Basu (Chaudhuri, 2025).

These three scandals are the most prominent and proven scams of the decade of 2010-2020. Apart from these big three, there are many more to count-

- Unfair Election: West Bengal has a very long history of rigged elections (Chappa Vote). Every government, every party uses force to rig votes. In rural places of West Bengal, Chappa Vote is very common; even in some places, voting is just symbolic, local party leaders and power holders force or bribe people to vote for them. Many people have died fighting for or in the exercise of their democratic rights. From CPI-M to TMC, every government utilises force to win elections.
- Fake Govt. Documents: Making fake government documents in West Bengal is a very common practice. For some money, corrupt politicians and bureaucrats or even lower-level administrative staffs, helps to create fake documents. These practices are smooth in Rural places of West Bengal, where the local authorities never check or knowingly issue fake documents. Fake birth certificates, caste certificates, or even Aadhar cards are now easy to make. Fake Income certificates are so easy to issue with the help of the local authority. In Panchayet areas, most of the works are done by the ruling party's party office. Corruption tends to thrive at the local level, often escaping the notice of higher authorities like the Block divisional officer (BDO) or Sub-Divisional officer (SDO). And even when they do become aware, the power of money and influence can silence dissenting voices.
- Resource Distribution: One major issue with government welfare schemes and disaster relief efforts is the unfair distribution of resources. A significant portion often gets siphoned off by politicians, bureaucrats, and local power brokers, leaving only a meagre amount for the intended beneficiaries. For instance, the Amphan cyclone aid distribution was so corrupt that CM Mamata Banerjee had to expel several TMC leaders from the party. Not only the TMC, but the BJP and CPI-M have also faced protests in some areas over allegations of fraud related to the 'Amphan' aid delivery (The New Indian Express, 2020).

METHODOLOGY:

This study is based on a qualitative research method to examine the patterns and nature of political corruption in West Bengal between 2010 and 2020.

Research Design:

The study adopted a descriptive and analytical approach, thoroughly reviewing existing literature, media archives and official documents. Grounded in thematic analysis, which is suitable for identifying, organising, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. The Thematic analysis allows me to move beyond surface descriptions of corruption cases and trace underlying continuities.

Data Source and Collection:

All the data was sourced from credible secondary sources. These included:

- Official reports & statements: ED, WBSSC; documents related to major scandals.
- Academic literature; peer-reviewed journal articles and research papers focusing on the decade of 2010-2020, major scandals of West Bengal, etc.
- Official websites: official websites of major parties, portals and archives.
- Reputable news media like The Hindu, The Indian Express, The Times of India, Hindustan Times, The Telegraph, etc., also many digital archives of media houses.

Ethical consideration:

As this study only used publicly available secondary data, ethical approval was not required for primary data collection. Proper citation and adherence to academic integrity were maintained throughout the research.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

First and most important limitation of this study is the dependence on secondary data, which may reflect media framing biases; the second is the time period of 2010-2020. Many scams and corruptions happened just after this timeline, for instance, the coal and cattle smuggling scam, the Pan India NEET scam, the RG Kar Medical College rape case, the Jadavpur University student

suicide/murder case, and many more. These cases are mainly political patronage corruption, mostly criminals were associated with some political parties. Cases like the Saradha group scandal, Narada scandal, and SSC scam are still unfolding, with potentially more critical evidence to surface in the future.

FINDINGS:

1. Normalisation of 'Everyday' Bribery: corruption as a necessary evil.
2. Political economy of dejection: A large segment of the population feels left behind by the formal economy.
3. Transformation of Corruption Mechanisms: Corruption shifted from the Left rule's institutionalised ‘party society’ to the TMC's decentralised ‘franchise model’.
4. Systemic Institutional Capture: from SSC to many government jobs.
5. Vanishing Public Trust in Governance: growing major scams and daily life corruption.
6. Normalisation of ‘Cut Money’ Culture: Informal bribe-taking became institutionalised.
7. Elite Capture of Welfare Schemes: distribution and public works were often diverted towards party loyalists, demonstrating elite control over developmental resources.

OUR BELIEF & RECOMMENDATION:

The decade between 2010 and 2020 in West Bengal was not just a period of a series of scandals; it was a crucial time that witnessed a deep shift in the very way political corruption worked. The old, rigid party-controlled system of the Left Front gave way to the Trinamool Congress’s more personal, leader-focused approach. At the top of the umbrella, massive financial scams like the Saradha group scam and Rose Valley scam flourished under political protection, while the Narada sting operation revealed the long truth of a culture of direct bribery. Later, we saw that vital public institutions were hollowed out, with the School Service Commission's jobs-for-cash scam being the most radiant example of this corruption. At the street level, a culture of “everyday” corruption took hold, where paying small bribes became a normal and even “necessary evil” for citizens just to get things done; a damaging system where, from officer to peon, everyone is corrupt. This era left a legacy of broken public trust and weakened state institutions, yet the ruling party remained popular at the polls, largely because of welfare schemes like ‘Lakshmir Bhandar’, 1,10,000 rupees

to the clubs for Durga puja and what not. But the unemployed youths of Bengal are unseen; education, healthcare, and livelihood are at stake.

To fight against these deep-rooted problems, we need to adopt a multi-dimensional approach. First, trust in public institutions must be restored. This means giving anti-corruption watchdogs true independence and completely reforming government recruitment with transparent, technology-based systems to bring back fairness and merit. Second, making all the public services or at least most of the public services digital, this step can cut out the middlemen who demand bribes. Already, we have an electronic FIR(E) system, many E-portals, etc. Immediately removing corrupt politicians from the party, promoting public education, healthcare, funding them and improving them. Empowering citizens to directly audit government projects in their communities would also create grassroots accountability. Finally, there must be swift and certain consequences for corruption. This requires special fast-track courts to handle corruption cases, dismantling the culture of impunity. A more transparent and straightforward process for business investment would also curb opportunities for bribery and help foster genuine economic growth. Last but not least, people have to be more politically aware. They need to know the value of their single vote; one vote can change their entire future or can destroy generation after generation. Only by taking these steps together can the state begin to mend its broken institutions and win back the people's faith in governance.

REFERENCE

Bardhan, P., Mitra, S., Mookherjee, D., & Nath, A. (2014, March 15). Changing voting patterns in rural West Bengal: Role of clientelism and local public goods. Economic and Political Weekly, 49(11), 54–62. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24479298

Biswas, S. C. (2017). Corruption as political vandalism in Bengal politics: Role of the ruler since 2011. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2(3). https://doi.org/10.53555/eijhss.v2i3.261

Chattopadhyay, S. S. (2025, 5 September). Bengal's 'tainted list' leaves more questions than answers. Frontline. Retrieved 30 October 2025, from https://frontline.thehindu.com/politics/wbssc-recruitment-scam-tainted-candidates-supreme-court-trinamool/article70016261.ece

Chaudhuri, M. (2025, September 12). Court frames charges in SSC job scam; Partha Chatterjee, 20 others to face trial. The Telegraph. Retrieved October 30, 2025, from https://www.telegraphindia.com/west-bengal/kolkata/court-frames-charges-in-ssc-job-scam-former-minister-partha-20-others-to-face-trial-prnt/cid/2122610

DD News. (2024, April 22). West Bengal teacher recruitment scam: Calcutta HC declares 2016 SSC recruitment null and void, orders fresh appointments. Retrieved October 29, 2025, from https://ddnews.gov.in/en/west-bengal-teacher-recruitment-scam-calcutta-hc-declares-2016-ssc-recruitment-null-and-void-orders-fresh-appointments/

Dr Kalyan Kumar Sarkar, Bharater Sangbidhan o Shasanbyabastha, Naboday Publications, Kolkata, 2019 (January).

GN, P. (2022, 6 December). Case study on Saradha Chit Fund scam. SSRN. Retrieved 27 October 2025, from https://ssrn.com/abstract=4268352

Jha, D., Ghatak, S., & Maiti, D. (2022, June 24). Political stability in West Bengal: Prosperity or decay? Economic and Political Weekly, 57(25), 121–127. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361500259

Joshi, S. (2025, September 20). How Mamata Government just stabbed Bengal and its industry in the back. Swarajya. Retrieved October 24, 2025, from https://swarajyamag.com/west-bengal/how-mamata-banerjees-betrayal-just-stabbed-bengal-and-its-industry-in-the-back

Kuniyl, S. R. (2024, August 8). How Singur and Nandigram blunders proved costly for Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and CPI(M). The Week. Retrieved October 24, 2025, from https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2024/08/08/how-singur-and-nandigram-blunders-proved-costly-for-buddhadeb-bhattacharya-and-cpim.html

Majhi, B. Corruption Allegations in Mamata Banerjee's Government. Zeitschrift für Politik, 34(4), 1-15. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383433411_Zeitschrift_fur_Politik_Corruption_Allegations_in_Mamata_Banerjee's_Government

Mathur, S., & Dutt, S. (2024). A fractured trust: Examining the case of the Saradha Chit Fund. International Journal of Interdisciplinary Innovative Research & Development, 8(2), 93-104. https://www.ijiird.com

Ministry of Corporate Affairs. (2025, July 22). Relocation of companies from West Bengal (Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 221). Government of India.

Nath, S. (2017, May 27). Everyday politics and corruption in West Bengal. Economic and Political Weekly, 52(21), 22–25. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26696118

Sarkar, A. (2015, July-September). Chit fund scam: A game in Bengal. The Indian Journal of Political Science, 76(3, Special Issue), 384-388. Indian Political Science Association. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26534851

Sengupta, S. (2024, April 22). HC declares null and void 2016 recruitment test for West Bengal govt-sponsored aided schools. The New Indian Express. Retrieved October 29, 2025, from https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2024/Apr/22/hc-declares-null-and-void-2016-recruitment-test-for-west-bengal-govt-sponsored-aided-schools-3

The Economic Times. (2025, April 11). Explained: SSC scam in WB – The case behind nearly 26,000 school teachers losing jobs. Retrieved October 29, 2025, from https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/explained-ssc-scam-in-wb-the-case-behind-the-nearly-26000-school-teachers-job-cancellation/articleshow/120196501.cms

The New Indian Express. (2020, July 15). Cyclone Amphan aid scam: TMC expels party leaders; BJP, CPI(M) talk tough too. Retrieved October 30, 2025, from https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2020/Jul/15/cyclone-amphan-aid-scam-tmc-expels-party-leaders-bjp-cpim-talk-tough-too-2170124.html

Times of India. (2021, May 19). What is Narada sting tape case: All you need to know. Retrieved October 28, 2025, from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/what-is-narada-sting-tape-case-all-you-need-to-know/articleshow/82764764.cms